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THE REGION

Long-Range Transit Plan Is Approved

Regional agency's \$213-billion blueprint includes calls for major growth at smaller airports, a magnetic-levitation railway and a higher gas tax.

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A Southern California government organization on Thursday adopted a controversial long-range transportation plan that calls for dramatic growth in the region's small airports, a magnetic-levitation train system and more toll lanes on freeways, including the 710 and the 101.

The \$213-billion plan, which sets the region's transportation agenda for the next 25 years, also proposes a 10-cent-per-gallon increase in state gas taxes to pay for projects and more land-use planning, including higher-density development in urban areas.

"It's a watershed for this region," said Bev Perry, president of the Southern California Assn. of Governments and a Brea councilwoman, on the plan's advocacy. "This is what we do if we want to keep the region moving. We took the leadership to bring forward those ideas."

The plan was approved by an overwhelming majority of SCAG's regional council of more than 40 elected officials representing Los Angeles, Ventura, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Imperial counties. But it also drew some heated criticism.

Charles Lombardo, president of the Burbank-Glendale-Pasadena Airport Authority, called the plan a "scam" for projecting such high growth in air traffic.

The plan projects that the current annual passenger load at Burbank's Bob Hope Airport will more than double to 10.7 million travelers by 2030. Palmdale Airport, which has no commercial service, would be developed into an international hub for nearly 13 million passengers a year.

"You all have a numbers problem," Lombardo said.

SCAG planners acknowledge these are aggressive blueprints for Southern California's future, but defended them as necessary for the region's vitality.

"This plan talks about things that are not popular ... things that politicians don't like to talk about," said Hasan Ikhrata, director of transportation planning and policy for SCAG.

The plan, which is updated every three years, is required by federal law. Projects must be included in the plan to receive state or federal funding. Other priorities identified in the plan include expanding Metrolink, building more carpool lanes, adding more Metro Rapid bus lines and encouraging telecommuting.

This year's plan projects that by 2030, the region's 17 million residents will grow to 23 million, and air traffic will balloon from the current 78 million passengers annually to 170 million. To help maintain the highway and transit system as well as pay for new projects, the plan urges \$30 billion be raised through taxes and \$60 billion from user fees such as tolls.

A key part of the plan is a so-called maglev train system to connect area airports. Some regional council members, including L.A. County Supervisor and Metropolitan Transportation Authority board member Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, questioned the railway's feasibility, but still backed the plan.

Despite heated neighborhood opposition, the plan calls for making the 710 and 101 freeways into toll corridors. Two lanes would be added to each direction of the 710, though the report does not specify if it would be within the existing right of way or require more property. The plan also includes a proposal to expand the 101, largely within its existing right of way.

"Whereas folks thought the concept of expanding the 101 is dead, it's not at all," said Calabasas Councilman Dennis Washburn.

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